

ABSTRACT

THESIS: A phenomenological study of African American women with natural textured hair and their experiences attending a predominantly White institution

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The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of undergraduate African American women who decided to wear their natural hair texture. In particular, this study focused on their personal experiences while attending a predominantly White institution and how this environment impacted their lives personally and academically. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten African American undergraduate women with natural hair.

The themes identified were as follows: natural hair definition, hair damage, support system which included the sub-themes of influence of family and peers and social media, campus experience, identity, and longevity of movement. The participants shared positive social interactions on campus, yet shared some poignant instances of discomfort signaling cultural tensions present in higher education communities. This study is relevant to student affairs professionals and faculty members because they will be able to engage in meaningful interactions and provide support to African American women with natural hair at predominately White institutions.